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ABSTRACT

The lack of reading instruction for seventh and eighth graders is detrimental to their academic development at a most crucial educational period. This study presents both theory and data which substantiate the need for including reading as a specific curriculum element in the middle school. Middle school organizational plans are outlined and traditional reading programs for junior high students are discussed. Statistical information collected from the diagnostic test data of 367 middle school students in a Virginia school indicated reading skills deficiencies in areas such as specific categories of word analysis and comprehension. Several successful reading programs described in recent literature are summarized. Recommendations are given for the establishment of a continued reading skills program for all students in the middle school, not just remedial students. (MKM)

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READING: AN ESSENTIAL IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

A Paper

Presented to

Dr. Schindler of the Graduate School

George Mason University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Course
Education 590

by
Betty-Jo Dawkins
December 1975

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to show that reading is essential in the middle school curriculum. The teaching of reading is seen as vital to kindergarten years when readiness to read is a major concern. Instruction in reading gains momentum from first grade through primary grades, accumulating new emphasis in the intermediate period of grades four, five and six. The traditional stance is that the student, having completed grade six, has likewise completed the sequences required in "Learning to Read" and must thereafter be challenged to "Read to Learn." Beyond elementary school, reading teachers and reading programs have been sentenced to the remedial realm and have been viewed as luxuries provided for a few pupils with special learning difficulties. This traditional approach is detrimental to the academic development of seventh and eighth graders at a most crucial educational period. Reading for these students should be considered not as an incidental in the instructional program but as essential to the curriculum. This study will present both theory and data which substantiate the need for including reading as a specific curriculum element in the middle school.

Definitions and Delimitations

"Curriculum" is herein considered as the general overall plan of the content of instruction that the school offers the student by way of qualifying him for graduation from high school.

"Middle School" is the administrative unit between elementary grades and high school grades. The term is used in this paper to refer to students in seventh and eighth grades, organized in a format designed to serve a transitional function between elementary school and high school. Chapter 2 will draw distinctions between the Middle School and the more common "Junior High School."

The term "secondary" is used in the usual dichotomy of instruction prior to high school graduation. It includes the period between elementary and collegiate educational divisions and, therefore, encompasses both the junior high and the middle school as delimited in this paper.

"Reading" is herein limited to the area of a planned instructional program as contrasted with the incidental teaching of reading. This instruction in reading involves those reading abilities essential to successful performance in reading and to continuous growth and development in general reading achievement. Such reading abilities are labeled "skills."

Importance of the Problem

Even within the past three months front-page news items have dealt with the problem of reading, problems with reading, and problem readers. Some wish to challenge the

illiterate high school graduate who proudly claims his high school diploma. Citizens are shocked by statistics showing the percentage of their fellows who have not achieved the level of survival reading. Teachers moan, "Half the kids in our tenth grade science classes can't read!" High school administrators compile budgets which provide for expensive adjusted reading materials and special classes for poor readers. Still, many schools halt reading instruction at the time students are promoted from the elementary level.

Voluminous material is available in the field of reading. The last decade has, likewise, produced an impressive array of writings on the middle school--its philosophy, its flexibility, and its idealistic anticipations. Little attention, however, has been given directly to the role of reading in the middle school. Now it is time to analyze the singular needs of the middle school population and to begin to build into the curriculum features as unique as the dream purports. The goal of this paper is to offer a specific technique for advancing the reading competency of middle school students.

Sources of Material

Materials used for this paper range from special studies commissioned by the International Reading Association to first-person journal accounts by reading teachers who have reported on successful innovative programs. Generally attention has been given to literature issued during the last eight years. Some generalizations, however, have been drawn from secondary reading programs prior to that.

Aware of the sparsity of research data related to middle school reading, the writer presents statistical information collected from 367 middle school students. The statistical study is of diagnostic test data acquired from a testing program during September, 1974 and September, 1975, involving seventh and eighth graders at the George Mason Middle School, Falls Church, Virginia.

Organization of the Paper

Background information on the middle school organizational plan will be outlined in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 there is discussion of traditional reading programs beyond the elementary level, followed by a chapter on the critical appraisals of traditional programs, as viewed by leaders in the field of reading. Statistical evidence of the reading needs of seventh and eighth graders at George Mason Middle School is found in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 summarizes a study, drawn from recent literature, of successful reading programs for seventh and eighth graders. Conclusions and recommendations are delineated in the concluding chapter, with the writer calling for agreement that reading is an essential in the middle school curriculum.

Chapter 2

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

The unique characteristics and the special needs of the preadolescent and the early adolescent led educators in the 1960's to consider a reorganization of the conventional patterns of grouping and housing grades for purposes of instruction. Excited by the prospect of something new on the horizon, administrators toyed with numerous combinations. 4-4-4, 5-3-4, and 6-2-4. From the midst of all the numerical juggling there emerged the Middle School Movement. Some viewed it an ideal arrangement for grades five, six, seven, and eight; others thought it best to narrow the scope to grades six through eight; a third group wanted only seventh and eighth graders together; an occasional spokesman wanted to add grade nine to various of the other combinations.

Advocates of the middle school idea, disagreeing as to the ideal population, were reasonably united as to the desired features of this new organizational pattern: (1) it must offer continued general education, building on students' elementary experiences, (2) it must provide for many exploratory opportunities, (3) it must prepare students for the more specialized requirements of senior high school, (4) it must strive for the personal development of the student, and (5) it must incorporate an instructional system that focused

on individual progress. Planning committees dreamed on paper:

The 'Middle School' will exist as a school in its own right, free of the image of the senior high school and free to serve as an educational laboratory for the early adolescent. It would serve as a transitional phase between the paternalism of the neighborhood elementary school and the varied, departmentalized environment of the senior high school. The school would depart fundamentally from elements of the present junior high school which contribute to early sophistication and its undesirable by-products.¹

The 1974 president of the National Middle School Association emphasized that the term "middle school" stands for a concept--not an organizational pattern. "There is no single design for a middle school."² Committed personnel present strong appeals, such as:

A middle... school is more than a place or a staff or a student body; it is a process of awakening. Education is personal. Each learner is most interested in his own life, history, interests, activities, tastes, limitations, and interactions....Each youth is to be helped toward awareness and composure. Each should be reassured and incited by whatever means his unique personality requires.³

Such ambition for the middle school met with skepticism. Fred Wilhelms memorialized the concerns by expressing fear that a middle school student might come out as friendly as a pup and just about as ignorant! In quoting Wilhelms, Baughman adds the realism of common

¹Leslie W. Kindred and others, The Intermediate Schools (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 97.

²Stephen E. Pierson, "Practical Programs in Progress," Middle School Journal, IV (Winter, 1973), 53.

³M. Dale Baughman, "Design for Change: New Curriculum Developments in Junior High/Middle Schools," Middle School Journal, V (Summer, 1974), 19.

sense and announces, "What appears to be needed is a balance of the cognitive and affective domains."⁴ Many would agree that the middle school venture is still young and has not established its impact. Hopefully, it will be able to live up to its promises. Fear has been voiced that the middle school, without well-defined concepts and programs, will be nothing more than a transplant from elementary and/or secondary school. The challenge of the middle school approach awaits both the sensitive, guiding teacher and the creative curriculum designer. Each finds a place in the "New Catechism for the (Middle) School":

Who is the Pupil?
A child of God, not a tool of the state.
Who is the Teacher?
A guide, not a guard.
Who is the Faculty?
A community of scholars, not a union of mechanics.
Who is the Principal?
A master of teaching, not a master of teachers.
What is Learning?
A journey, not a destination.
What is Discovery?
Questioning the answers, not answering the questions.
What is the Process?
Discovering ideas, not covering content.
What is the Goal?
Opened minds, not closed issues.
What is the Text?
Being and becoming, not remembering and reviewing.
What is a (Middle) School?
Whatever we choose to make it.⁵

The professional who plans a reading program for middle school students functions in a privileged position.

⁴Ibid., p. 18.

⁵Paul S. George, "A Middle School--If You Can Keep It," Middle School Journal, VI (Spring, 1975), 6.

The strategies of middle school reading programs "must be developed to contribute to, as well as take full advantage of, the uniqueness of the middle school concept."⁶

⁶Gerald G. Duffy, ed., Reading in the Middle School (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1974), p. 58.

Chapter 3

TRADITIONAL SECONDARY^{School} READING PROGRAMS

Surveying the literature, the middle school reading teacher discovers that beyond elementary school, reading programs have traditionally been of three types: (1) remedial, (2) corrective, (3) developmental. Smith characterizes the three types:

The term remedial reading is commonly applied to work with those students who are seriously retarded in reading, and who need highly specialized diagnosis and intensive treatment. Often these students are taught individually, sometimes in small groups.... Some of these cases may be receiving treatment for other difficulties from specialists in other fields. It often takes a comparatively long period of treatment for such students to reach their mental potential in reading achievement.... Corrective reading is used to designate the type of work done with less serious cases, those who perhaps are retarded only a year or so in terms of potential, who apparently have no deep-seated causes of difficulty, and who respond readily to treatment.... Developmental reading is concerned fundamentally with the continued refinement and development of the more mature aspects of the self-same types of abilities that were being refined and developed in the elementary school.⁷

The three traditional types of secondary^{school} reading programs vary in organization, methodology, and effectiveness

⁷Nila Blanton Smith, "Questions Administrators Ask about Reading in Secondary Schools," Corrective Reading in the High School Classroom, eds. H. Alan Robinson and Sidney J. Rauch (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1966), p. 116.

as they relate to the generally accepted reading needs of high school students. These needs have been delineated as the need to:

1. Increase vocabulary and word perception skills.
2. Improve basic comprehension skills.
3. Improve work-study skills.
4. Read critically and evaluate what is read.
5. Develop more mature reading interests and tastes.⁸

Secondary^{school} reading teachers have been accused of constantly surveying these needs--to the extent that faculty associates sometimes claim that the result is far more testing than teaching. Perhaps in reality testing has been no more time-consuming than has been the lengthy debate on old questions, such as: "Should we emphasize developmental or remedial programs?" "Should reading instruction be mandatory or voluntary?" "Should we work with those who exhibit great potential or with those who display severe, long-term difficulties?"

Research studies in high school reading are exceeded by elementary school reading studies at a ratio of about six to one....At the secondary level the issues are more obscure The innovations appear to be far fewer and not nearly so dramatic as new proposals for elementary school.⁹

⁸J. T. Hunt, "The Refinement of High School Reading Skills," Teaching Reading Skills in Secondary Schools, eds. Arthur V. Olson and Wilbur S. Ames (Scranton, Pennsylvania: International Textbook Company, 1970), pp. 28-29.

⁹Richard W. Burnett, "Reading in the Secondary School: Issues and Innovations," Teaching Reading Skills in Secondary Schools, eds. Arthur V. Olson and Wilbur S. Ames (Scranton, Pennsylvania: International Textbook Company, 1970), p. 11.

The teaching of secondary^{school} reading is frequently confused with the teaching of slow learners.¹⁰ The secondary^{school} teacher is often stereotyped as a "remedial" specialist who reteaches primary grade skills to enviably small numbers of students.¹¹

Kindred in his book, The Intermediate School, devotes less than two hundred words to the reading specialist. He all but equates such school personnel with special luxuries, stating, "Many schools are realizing the need for reading specialists. Reading problems hopefully are dealt with at the elementary level."¹²

In 1967-68 the Indiana Department of Public Instruction surveyed the reading programs in junior and senior high schools in that state. Questionnaires were returned from eighty-three percent of the schools. This study supported other surveys which report that English teachers who lack formal training in reading are usually assigned the basic responsibility for reading instruction. Only ten percent of the schools reported qualified reading teachers who had completed a graduate program in elementary or secondary reading.¹³ (It is interesting to note that another survey involving English

¹⁰ A. Sterl Artley, Trends and Practices in Secondary School Reading (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1968), p. 38.

¹¹ U. Berkley Ellis, "Developmental Reading in Junior High School," Teaching Reading Skills in Secondary Schools, eds. Arthur V. Olson and Wilbur S. Ames (Scranton, Pennsylvania: International Textbook Company, 1970), p. 30.

¹² Kindred, op. cit., p. 368.

¹³ Roger Farr, James Laffey, and Rexel Brown, "Secondary Reading Programs in Indiana: Status and Needs," Journal of Reading, XIII (January, 1970), 270-271.

teachers generalized that "when the teachers were asked to comment on the importance of reading instruction, they either denied responsibility or claimed they taught reading all the time" ¹⁴

In 1968 a survey of practices in secondary ^{school} reading in California indicated that "approximately one-third of the programs have a course of study; the remainder are described as haphazard or piecemeal." ¹⁵ After reviewing one state-wide study of programs for grades seven and eight, Artley warned, "It is apparent that, in discussing programs, one needs to be cognizant of type and quality, for a reading program might be little more than one in name only." ¹⁶ Later in summary he reports on narrowly conceived objectives and on services to only a small segment of the total school population. ¹⁷

It was the hope of providing reading instruction for a larger percentage of high school students that gave rise to the idea of teaching reading in the content areas. Stanchfield and Wiseman trace the growth of this plan, quoting the 1925 declaration of the National Committee on Reading: "The teacher of every curriculum field is

¹⁴A. Sterl Artley, "Are Secondary Developmental Reading Programs Feasible?" The Quest for Competency in Teaching Reading, ed. Howard A. Klein (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1972), p. 76.

¹⁵Duffy, op. cit., p. 89.

¹⁶Artley, Trends and Practices in Secondary School Reading, p. 37.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 107.

recognized as a teacher of reading."¹⁸ This approach has captured the imagination of curriculum designers; optimism is rampant even today. However, research confirms that more is required than simply arming content area teachers with a few inservice hours and a pep talk about the SQ3R method of surveying a chapter. Burnett warns of the "resistance of the subject-matter specialist to any in-depth consideration of methods, materials, and techniques."¹⁹ Russell raises serious doubts about the feasibility of teaching reading in content areas, calling it a plan "to charge the secondary faculty at large with a task they are unwilling and untrained to do."²⁰

Constance McCullough, 1974-1975 president of International Reading Association, has questioned the place of reading in the evolvement of the middle school concept. She perceives that "either it continues to be what it was in a previous structure or it is crowded out by the major purpose for reorganization."²¹ A look at traditional secondary^{school} reading forces one to question the security of reading "in the previous structure" and, indeed, to scrutinize its effectiveness.

¹⁸Jo M. Stanchfield and Mel Wiseman, "Cognitive Skills Development for Secondary English Teachers," Journal of Reading, XVIII (October, 1974), 35.

¹⁹Burnett, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

²⁰Sheldon N. Russell, "A Crucial Problem Facing Secondary Education," Journal of Reading, XVII (May, 1974), 603.

²¹Duffy, op. cit., p. v.

Chapter 4

THE NEED FOR SECONDARY ^{SCHOOL} READING INSTRUCTION

Two rallying points in modern education are (1) assessment of needs and (2) accountability. Those responsible for middle school curriculum planning meet both these educational motivators in discovering that:

Several regional and state-wide studies indicate that there is a decline in reading growth beginning at about the age of entrance into junior high school. This lag in growth is not only relative to that maintained throughout the primary-elementary years, but also lower in relation to the normal and consistent increase in mental age.... A number of factors...may account for this disturbing condition. The most apparent reason is that there is little concerted effort to provide systematic reading instruction beyond grade six as is provided on the earlier grade levels.... That this situation need not exist is indicated by the many studies showing that students on all levels from the dullest to the brightest showed significant improvement when reading instruction, either developmental or corrective, was provided.²²

As recently as 1970 one researcher reported that in secondary schools having reading services, the programs are isolated entities and purely remedial. "In fact there seemed to be little evidence of the idea that reading should permeate the whole curriculum."²³ Reasons for this situation were listed as absence of qualified reading personnel, lack

²² Artley, Trends and Practices in Secondary School Reading, p. 107.

²³ Artley, "Are Secondary Developmental Reading Programs Feasible?" p. 81.

of concern, lack of priority, lack of facilities, lack of time, cost of materials, and absence of any coordinated pattern or system of instruction.

Summers denounces the "'stop gap' or compromise nature" of most secondary^{school} reading programs, declaring, "We are some way off from the ideal goal of providing reading instruction at the secondary level in the right amounts, at the right time for all students."²⁴ Strang teaches that "reading is no longer considered an elementary school subject. The need for instruction in reading in secondary school and colleges is clearly recognized."²⁵ Rogers recognizes "a gap...at the junior high level....which needs bridging above all others if we are not willing to trust to luck and nature."²⁶ Hunt clearly asserts:

Even though high school students may have been exposed to an excellent reading program in the elementary grades, it is presumptuous to assume that all previously taught skills have been mastered--even by the average or bright student. In any high school marked differences are likely to exist in performance among students on any given basic reading skill and also among skills for any one student....A proposal that English not be taught after the sixth grade except for a limited number requiring remedial English would be considered ludicrous, but yet there appears to be little evidence to suggest that the skills of reading are sharpened and refined to any greater degree without direct guidance and instruction than are those of English grammar and composition.²⁷

²⁴J. Allen Figurel, ed., Forging Ahead in Reading (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1968), p. 289.

²⁵Ruth Strang, "Progress in the Teaching of Reading in High School and College," Teaching Reading Skills in Secondary Schools, eds. Arthur V. Olson and Wilbur S. Ames (Scranton, Pennsylvania: International Textbook Company, 1970), p. 24.

²⁶Figurel, op. cit., p. 272. ²⁷Hunt, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

Pleading for "continuing instruction with continuity,"

Paradis and Arth remind the reader:

Research has indicated that a systematic activity in reading, regardless of method, will produce gains in reading skills....Reading and learning need to be viewed as life-long developmental processes; something that requires continued attention through grade six and far beyond.²⁸

With historical approach, Carrillo recalls:

Before we had junior high school, there was no question about it--reading was a required part of the curriculum in the seventh and eighth grades. Then because the new combination of grades developed a secondary school orientation and organization, somehow it assumed that the basic skills of reading were taught in the first six grades. Obviously, this was an incorrect assumption; not only do we know that there will be pupils in junior high reading at the second or third grade level....we know also that the skill of reading is never completely taught nor completely learned at any age....Reading instruction is essential in junior high school.²⁹

Kipling, too, calls for developmental reading instruction for all seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. He bases his request on the knowledge that a student should never stop refining and extending his learning skills.³⁰

The reading teacher may well conclude that "the middle school must do more than help to repair the learning

²⁸ Edward E. Paradis and Alfred A. Arth, "Reading: Vanguard of Junior High/Middle School Curriculum," Elementary English, VII (March, 1975), 330.

²⁹ Lawrence W. Carrillo, "Methods of Teaching Reading in the Junior High School," Challenge and Experiment in Reading, ed. J. Allen Figurel (New York: Scholastic Magazines, 1962), p. 47.

³⁰ Cecil Kipling, Jr., "An Optimum Reading Program for Grades K-12 and School District Organization," Planning for School District Organization, ed. R. D. Purdy (Lincoln: Nebraska State Department of Education, 1968), p. 107.
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skills of the students."³¹ Leaders in the field of reading know that the need is to provide these students with the necessary skills for surviving in later learning situations. When one considers the need for secondary reading instruction, he must also question the accountability of those who ignore research that reports that average youngsters can be helped to make more improvement in reading than below average readers.³²

³¹George, op. cit., p. 3.

³²Duffy, op. cit., p. 45.

Chapter 5

THE NEED AT GEORGE MASON MIDDLE SCHOOL

Much has been written concerning the structure, the goal, and the uniqueness of the middle school concept. Little has been said regarding the role of reading. Having collected materials for his volume on Reading in the Middle School, Duffy concluded, "A casual perusal of much of the middle school literature leaves one wondering whether reading even has a place in the middle school!"³³

Scholars in the field of reading are proclaiming the need for continuing instruction of reading into the seventh and eighth grades. No one denies that some students of that academic level require special instructional provisions. The writer joins with affirmative conviction the argument that all seventh and eighth graders should be included in reading programs. Studies show that even though the mean scores of good readers surpass those of deficient readers, there are still specific skills areas in which individual students show weaknesses.³⁴

In planning a comprehensive reading program for the George Mason Middle School, Falls Church, Virginia, the

³³Duffy, op. cit., p. vii.

³⁴Artley, Trends and Practices in Secondary School Reading, p. 27.

writer accumulated data that substantiates the claim that middle school students do exhibit skill weaknesses. Information from the diagnostic testing of 367 seventh and eighth graders in the George Mason Middle School clearly reveals the need for skills-centered reading instruction.

Acquiring the Data

Data on the George Mason population was not easily acquired. Although hundreds of reading tests have been published, few are designed specifically for seventh and eighth graders. Reading tests for students beyond the elementary level usually provide scores in three areas: (1) Comprehension, (2) Vocabulary, (3) Rate. Some supply a grade level achievement score. Such information is valuable in understanding a student's general academic achievement and in making placement in textual materials; it offers few guidelines for the improvement of specific skills deficiencies. A more definitive measurement is needed.

Search for appropriate testing instruments led to the McCullough Word Analysis Test (Ginn and Company, c1960) and Scott Foresman's Tactics A Diagnostic Test (c1972). Buros in his Seventh Mental Measurements Yearbook (c1972) evaluated the McCullough test as being:

....best single instrument of its type currently available for assessing the mechanical aspects of word-analysis. Used as a diagnostic device, these tests can be quite helpful in identifying ...youngsters who have specific difficulties that may interfere with the higher order cognitive processes that depend on accurate word recognition.³⁵

³⁵O.K. Buros, ed., The Seventh Mental Measurements Yearbook (Highland Park, New Jersey: Gryphon Press, 1972), p. 1118.

The McCullough Word Analysis Test has the following sub-test areas:

1. Blends and Digraphs
2. Phonetic Discrimination
3. Vowels
4. Sounding Whole Words
5. Dictionary Pronunciation
6. Syllabication
7. Root Words.

The Tactics A Test moves into the hierarchy of skills with:

1. Dictionary Meaning
2. Context
3. Inference
4. Main Idea
5. Relationships.

For diagnostic purposes neither test alone was adequate for seventh and eighth graders. Information from both, however, would offer a wide ranging profile of a student's strengths and weaknesses. Plans were made to administer both tests. Testing would be done by teams, with all team teachers serving as monitors. The McCullough Word Analysis Test was given one day; the Tactics A Test, the following day. Total working time for both days was approximately two hours and a half. A brief description of the nature of each of the twelve subtests appears in Appendix A.

These two tests were administered in September, 1974 to 248 Middle School seventh and eighth graders. In September, 1975 the new seventh grade class was given the same tests, thereby involving an additional 119 students in this investigative study. Students for whom English is a second language were excluded from the testing. Mainstreaming is a feature of the George Mason organizational plan; therefore,

all students, with the exception of the ESL group, appear in the test data, irrespective of measured IQ.

The writer decided that an efficiency index of seventy percent would be applied to subtest areas; that is, if there were ten test items in a subtest, a score of seven would be considered "passing." A score below the efficiency index of seventy percent would be labeled a "deficiency."

A paraprofessional assisted the writer in grading the tests. Raw data was subsequently printed by computer to facilitate further study and use of test scores. Test findings for the 367 students tested in 1974 and 1975 are summarized in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Further analysis is also given in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

Analyzing the Data

Table 1 reveals the number of students who showed deficiency in a given number of skills areas. For example, in September, 1974, of the 248 students tested, thirty-three had no deficiencies, while two students were deficient in eleven of the skills areas. Likewise, similar data is summarized for the 119 new seventh graders tested in September, 1975. Total is then computed for the entire group of 367 students tested in September, 1974 and in September, 1975.

Figure 1 shows in graphic form the determination of frequency of total number of deficiencies for the entire group of 367 test subjects, with data presented in percentage of total students tested.

Table 1

Frequency of Skills Deficiency
George Mason Middle School
Diagnostic Reading Tests
September 1974-1975

Total No. of Deficiencies	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
September, 1974													
Total 248 students	33	22	31	29	27	25	15	22	23	11	8	2	0
September, 1975													
Total 119 students	17	18	6	13	7	11	7	14	11	6	7	1	1
Grade 7													
Total 367 students	50	40	37	42	34	36	22	36	34	17	15	3	1
Grades 7-8													
1974-1975													

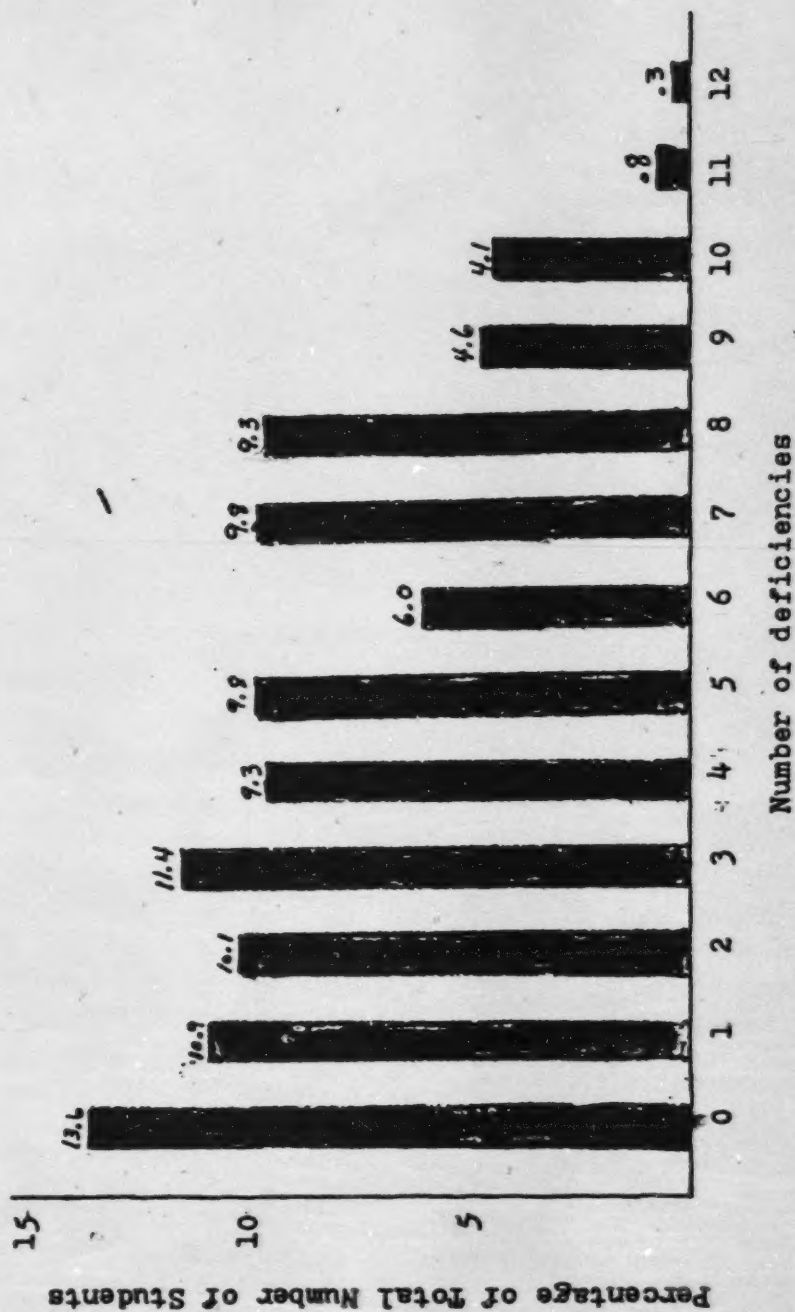


Figure 1
 Frequency of Skills Deficiency
 George Mason Middle School
 Diagnostic Reading Tests
 Grades 7-8, 1974-1975

Results of the tests can be further condensed:

<u>Number of students</u>	<u>Percentage of total students tested</u>	<u>Number of total deficiencies</u>
50	14%	none
77	21%	1-2
76	21%	3-4
58	15%	5-6
<u>106</u>	29%	7-12
Total 367		

Showing the number of students deficient in specific skill areas, Table 2 deals with the September, 1974 data. Table 2 gives this information first by team grouping for seventh graders and then for eighth graders, totaling finally the results for both seventh and eighth graders. The first seven skill labels are those from the McCullough Word Analysis Test. The reader will note that the George Mason population showed relatively few deficiencies in these word analysis areas, with the exception of the skills of "Dictionary Pronunciation" and "Sounding Whole Words." The "Sounding Whole Words" subtest is due further research into its validity. The written directions and the test items themselves appear confusing.

Table 3 presents the same informational format as Table 2, using data acquired from the new seventh grade class in September, 1975. Statistics are first given by team for this new seventh grade and then are totaled with information from Table 2 for the 248 seventh and eighth graders tested the previous year.

Table 2
Number of Students Deficient in Skills Areas
George Mason Middle School, Grades 7-8
Diagnostic Reading Tests, Sept. 1974

SKILLS AREAS	Blends and Digraphs	Phonetic Discrimination	Vowels	Sounding Whole Words	Dictionary Pronunciation	Syllabication	Root Words	Dictionary Meaning	Context	Inference	Main Idea	Relationships
Team X - Grade 7	1	4	0	16	11	2	3	11	10	8	12	15
Team Y - Grade 7	1	4	1	37	28	7	12	20	25	25	29	42
Team Z - Grade 7	0	6	0	36	31	6	8	27	23	18	26	37
Total Grade 7	2	14	1	89	70	15	23	58	58	51	67	90
Team X - Grade 8	0	4	2	14	8	4	6	10	16	12	16	19
Team Y - Grade 8	0	3	1	29	17	6	11	16	23	25	25	31
Team Z - Grade 8	1	2	1	26	24	6	12	22	22	21	22	34
Total Grade 8	1	9	4	69	49	16	29	48	61	58	63	84
Total Grades 7 and 8	3	23	5	158	119	31	52	106	119	109	130	174

Table 3
Number of Students Deficient in Skills Areas
George Mason Middle School, Grades 7-8
Diagnostic Reading Tests, 1974-1975

SKILLS AREAS	Blends and Digraphs	Phonetic Discrimination	Vowels	Sounding Whole Words	Dictionary Pronunciation	Syllabication	Root Words	Dictionary Meaning	Context	Inference	Main Idea	Relationships
Red Team - Gr. 7	0	7	2	31	26	7	17	24	29	18	26	33
White Team-Gr. 7	2	8	2	32	18	11	15	23	27	22	25	34
Blue Team -Gr. 7	0	3	0	14	9	6	6	10	12	7	9	13
Total Grade 7 1975	2	18	4	77	53	24	38	57	68	47	60	80
Total Grades 7-8 1974	3	23	5	158	119	31	52	106	119	109	130	174
Total 367 Students 1974 and 1975	5	41	9	235	172	55	90	163	187	156	190	254

In Figure 2 attention is called to the relative standing of each skill area in proportion to total number of deficiencies scored by the test population. The graph indicates that of the total number of deficiencies tabulated, the largest percentage appeared in the skill area of "Relationships." The next areas of highest concentration of deficiency were "Sounding Whole Words," "Main Idea," "Context," "Dictionary Pronunciation," "Dictionary Meaning," and "Inference," respectively. Four of these skills--Main Idea, Context, Inference, Relationships--involve reading skills that receive instructional attention in elementary school. That instruction, however, often comes under the larger category of General Comprehension. Many seventh and eighth graders are unaware even of a general definition of those skill terms.

Figure 3 points out the percentage of total students tested who were deficient in a specific skill area. For example, "Blends and Digraphs" was a problem section for little more than one percent of the students, while almost seventy percent failed to reach the established proficiency level for "Relationships."

Using such test data as that presented in Figure 3 is a challenging prospect for the middle school reading teacher. More than one half of all the students tested showed deficiency in finding the main idea of a paragraph. More than one half did not adequately apply context clues in determining the meaning of a word. Almost seventy percent did not successfully detect patterns of relationship in paragraphs. Failure to make appropriate inferences was

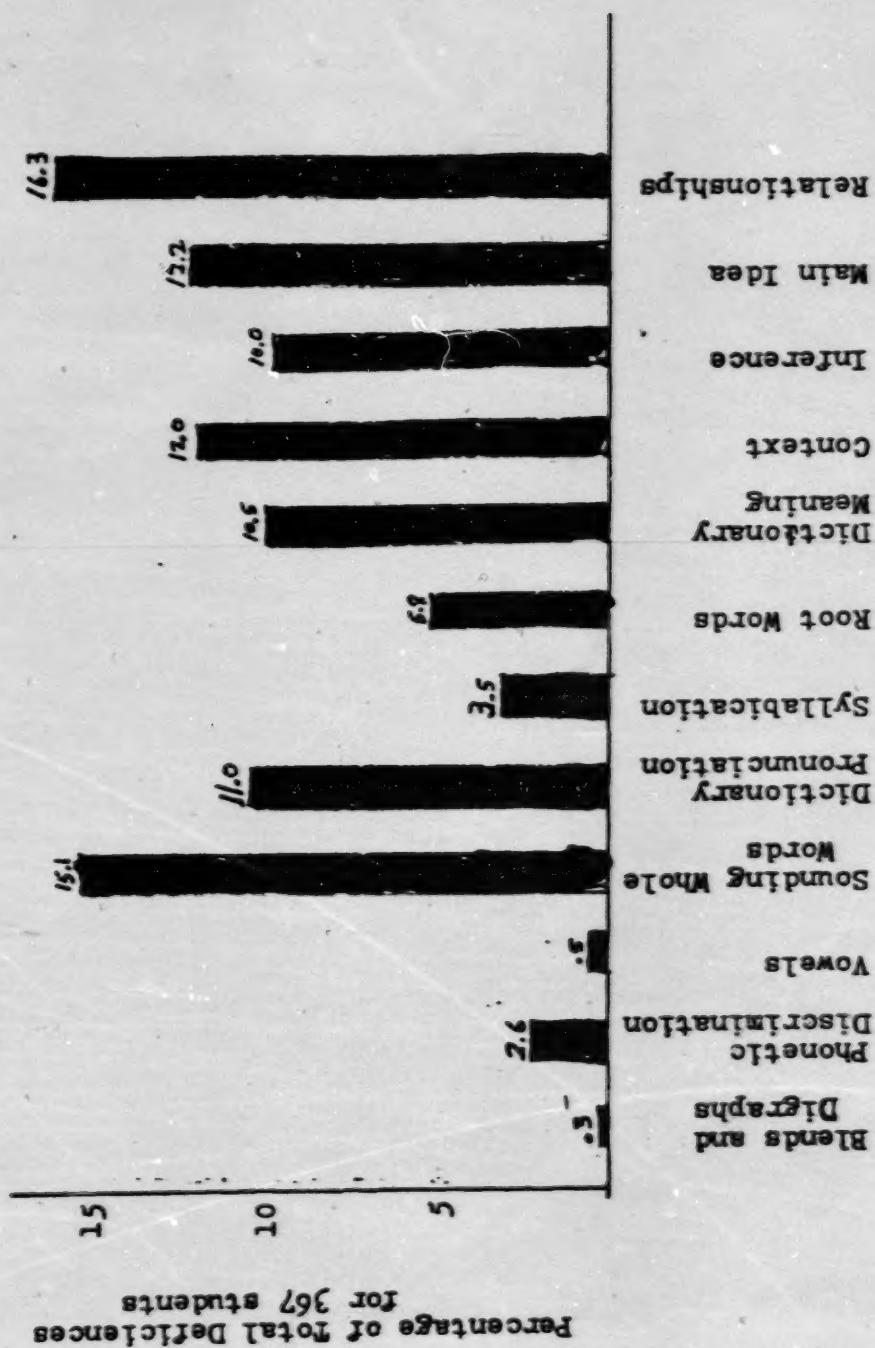


Figure 2

Concentration of deficiency by specific skills areas
George Mason Middle School
Diagnostic Reading Tests
Grades 7-8, 1974-1975

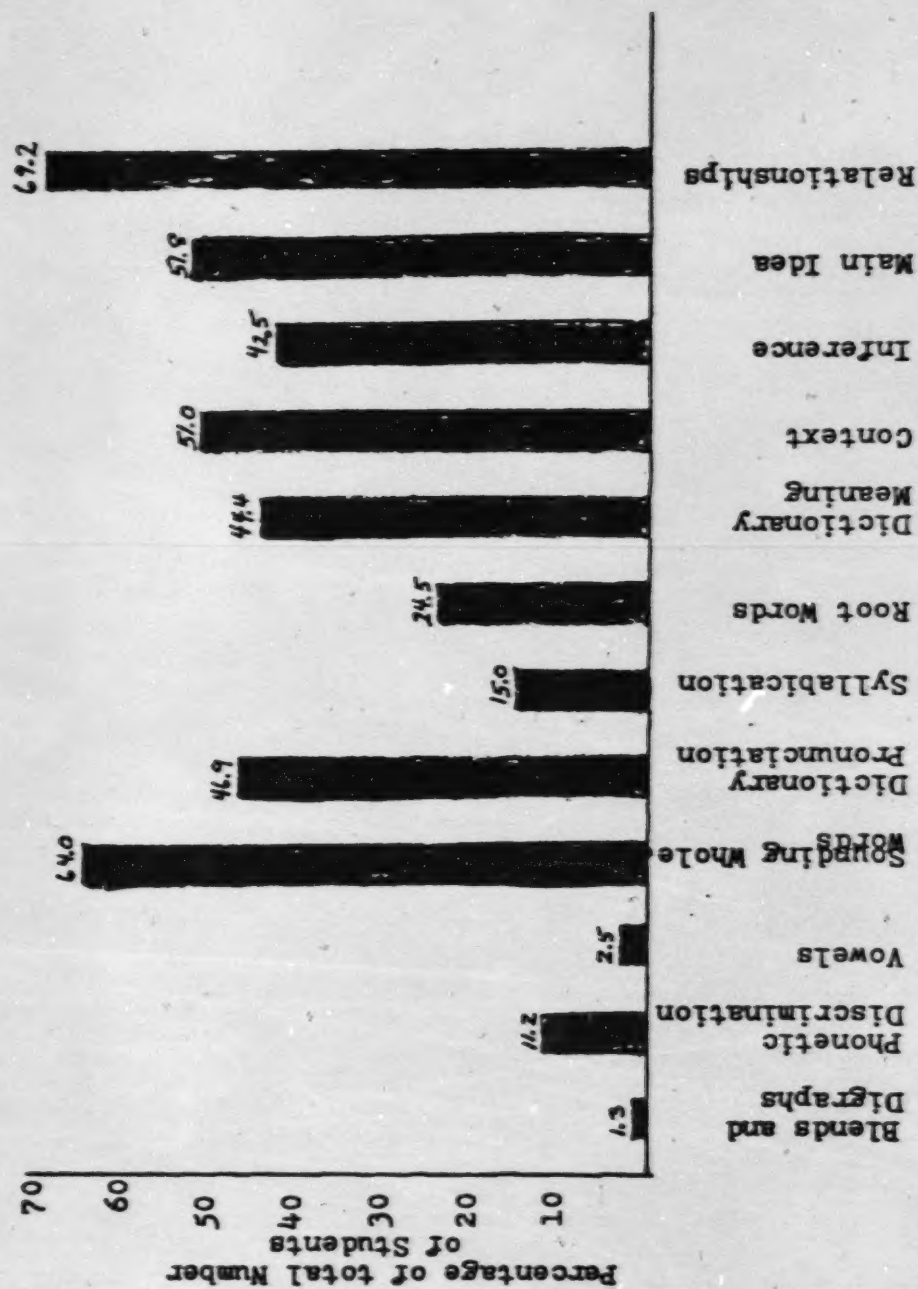


Figure 3

Percentage of Students Deficient in Specific Skills Areas
 George Mason Middle School
 Diagnostic Reading Tests
 Grades 7-8, 1974-1975

evident in forty-three percent of the students. Choosing the correct dictionary meaning and working with dictionary pronunciation also accounted for large percentages of skill weaknesses.

Extending the Data

In an effort to make a true assessment of the reading achievement of the George Mason Middle School population, in addition to the initial testing materials used in September, 1974, an Advanced Skills Inventory was adapted from testing areas in Scott-Foresman Tactics in Reading I and Tactics in Reading II. These are materials in a sequential series, of which Tactics A, used in the initial testing, is a first level. Skills tested with the advanced inventory were:

1. Figurative Language
2. Sentence Meaning
3. Judgments
4. Inferences
5. Relationships
6. Main Idea
7. Imagery

Three of these skill areas appeared on the initial test, but the advanced inventory incorporated more difficult material. For this advanced test an efficiency index (or "passing grade") of eighty percent was required. During the school year, 1974-1975, the test was administered to a total of fifty-two middle schoolers, selected because they had scored no more than two deficiencies in the original testing and had completed successfully prescriptive work for such deficiencies. These students represented those whom classroom teachers readily label the "really good readers."

Information derived from testing material compiled into an advanced skills inventory is presented in Figure 4 and Figure 5. Using the eighty percent efficiency index, six of the fifty-two students (eleven percent) showed no reading skills deficiencies; twenty-three percent had two deficiencies, and four percent were deficient in all seven of the skill areas. Figure 5 indicates the concentration of deficiency in specific skills, with "Inference," "Relationships," "Main Idea," and "Figurative Language," respectively, most often accounting for skill needs.

The six students who rated no deficiencies even on the advanced inventory were later given Reading Efficiency Checks (EDL/McGraw-Hill). No statistics were accumulated, but almost without exception, the students were found to need improvement in rate of reading. At the time of this writing, data is not yet available on the advanced skill needs of the seventeen new seventh graders who showed no deficiencies in the preliminary testing program in September.

It is obvious that the 367 seventh and eighth graders tested at George Mason Middle School showed specific weaknesses in skills areas. The 119 seventh graders tested in September, 1975 also took the Reading Comprehension subtest of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Level II (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). Grade level placement determined from that test ranged from below second grade to twelfth grade. Some of these middle school students qualify for the label of "good reader," but even they show evidence of a need for skills-centered reading instruction.

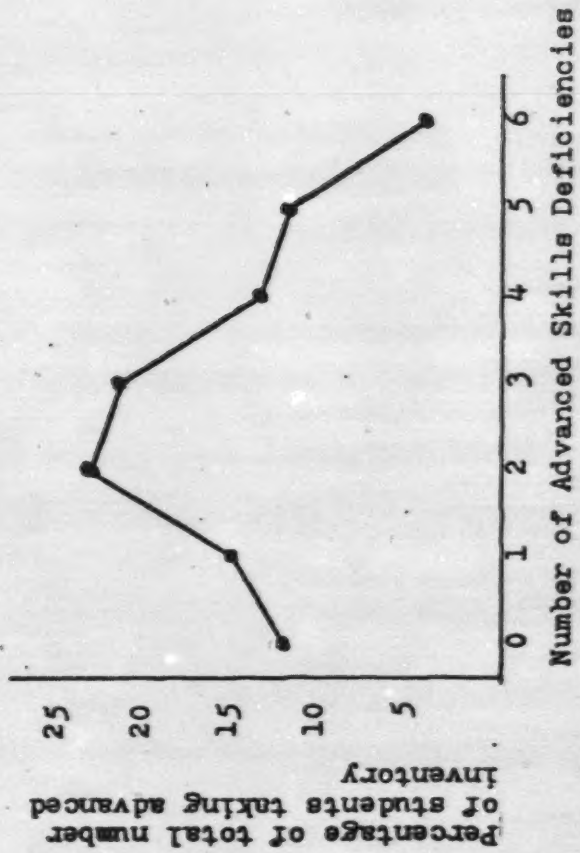


Figure 4
Frequency of Advanced Skills Deficiencies
George Mason Middle School
Grades 7-8
1974-1975

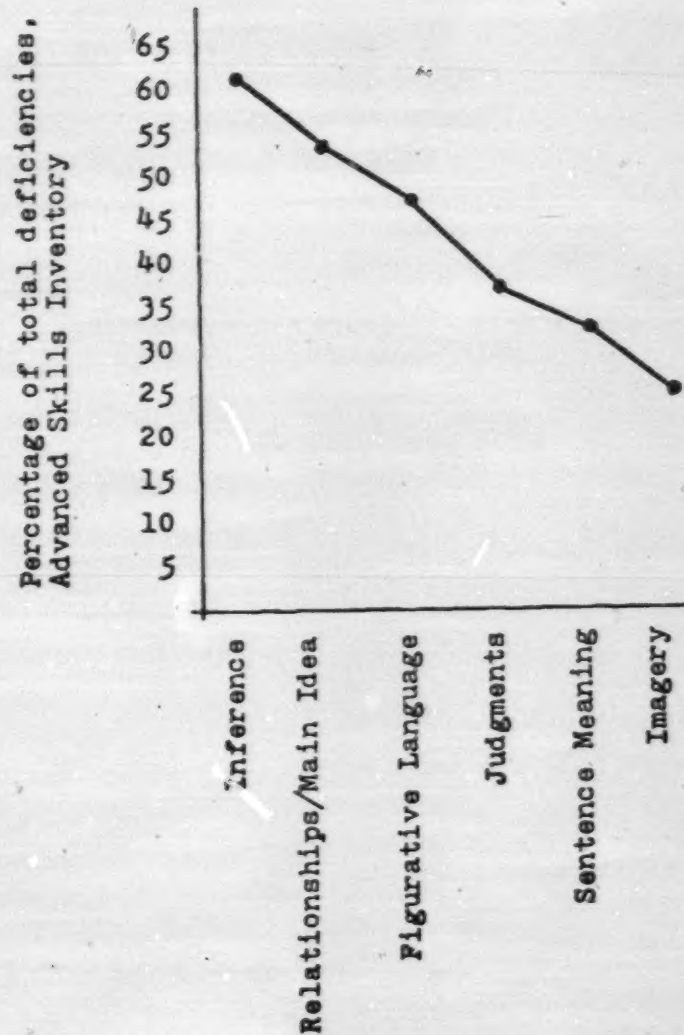


Figure 5

Concentration of Advanced Skills Deficiencies
George Mason Middle School
Grades 7-8
1974-1975

In the fall of 1975

This fall, a questionnaire was distributed to the George Mason Middle School personnel, regarding their training in the reading area. Of the ten team teachers and the middle school counselor, nine responded to the questionnaire, a copy of which may be found in Appendix B. The counselor reported seven hours of credit in courses directly related to reading, along with thirty hours of graduate work in Learning Disabilities, some of which concerned reading problems. One English teacher has completed six hours in the reading field. Though she has had no course work in reading, a science teacher formerly taught reading during two years employment as an elementary teacher and is now auditing a television reading course. A mathematics teacher indicated some instruction in reading during a course in teaching children with learning disabilities. These are all professionals with strong qualifications for working within the middle school concept. They are not, however, trained in the teaching of reading, even in their own content areas. This further indicates the need at George Mason Middle School for a comprehensive reading program with special emphasis on the direct and systematic teaching of skills.

Chapter 6

PERTINENT RESEARCH

Secondary^{school} reading programs have been accused of riding off in all directions! After observing and evaluating programs in action, Sidney Rauch declared that the ultimate success of any program is dominated by three factors: (1) the time devoted specifically to the teaching of skills, (2) the moral and material support of administrators, and (3) the awareness of content area teachers that they, too, have a responsibility to extend reading skills.³⁶

A search of the literature reveals that there are successful programs. Artley indicates:

A number of reports have been made of various types of developmental programs that include students other than those with reading handicaps. In some cases, these programs extend systematic instruction from the elementary grades through grades seven and eight through regularly organized reading classes.³⁷

The Title III reading program for the Matteson School District in Matteson, Illinois, is based upon the philosophy that "all students need work in skills development. Whether a student is reading at grade level, below grade level, or above grade level, he should be doing

³⁶Figurel, op. cit., p. 213.

³⁷Artley, Trends and Practices in Secondary School Reading, p. 108.

work in relevant skills."³⁸ The program there deals with the following large skill areas:

1. Word Recognition
2. Vocabulary Development
3. Literal Comprehension
4. Interpretative Comprehension
5. Analytical Comprehension
6. Study Skills
7. Enriched Reading
8. Composition

These eight areas are further divided into more than a hundred specific categories, with individualized learning packages available by level for each skill.

The two junior high schools in the South Orange-Maplewood School District in New Jersey reported an organizational plan whereby every seventh grade student takes reading two days a week, as a separate program in addition to English.³⁹ A study in East Chicago, Indiana, reported a program for seventh graders working with literal comprehension. The experimental group was significantly superior to the control group when pupils in the experimental classes had three days of regular English classwork and two days of reading instruction each week for fifteen weeks.⁴⁰

The middle school at P.K. Yonge Laboratory School, University of Florida, has initiated a developmental

³⁸Susan Gross and others, "Behavioral Objectives in a Reading Skills Program, Grades 4-8," The Reading Teacher, XXVII (May, 1974), 783.

³⁹Evelyn Jan-Tausch, "Teaching Developmental Reading in the Secondary School," Reading Instruction in Secondary Schools, International Reading Association Committee, Robert Karlin, chm. (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1964), p. 57.

⁴⁰Paradis and Arth, op. cit., p. 578.

individualized reading program for all sixth and eighth grades. Recognizing that the needs of adolescents are unique, a conscious effort was made to avoid modeling elementary reading programs. Decisions were based upon reasoning that:

A remedial program for a small group of poor readers was not congruent with the school statement of values, beliefs, and goals specifying that only those activities which enhance a student's self-concept should be included in the school's curriculum. It was felt that an inherent weakness in the remedial approach results when the student's perception of himself as an inadequate reader is reinforced through a public announcement of his deficiencies.⁴¹

After fifteen hours in the reading laboratory (spread over a six-week period), post-testing revealed that seventy-two percent of all students significantly improved their comprehension and vocabulary skills.

The Carl Hayden High School in Phoenix, Arizona has projected a "Saturation Reading Program," an all-inclusive reading program for ninth graders. Students are assigned to one of four levels: (1) Accelerated, (2) Developmental, (3) Corrective, and (4) Clinical. Experience there raises the question of optimum duration of instruction. Statistics reveal greater improvement in the first semester than in a second semester of enrollment.⁴² Likewise, the middle school associated with the University of Florida found that students who went through a second cycle

⁴¹Duffy, op. cit., p. 86.

⁴²Thomas F. McDonald and Phil L. Nacke, "A Two Year Study of a Saturation Reading Program," Journal of Reading, XII (March, 1969), 461.

of the program showed greater improvement if there were a lapse of several weeks between cycles.

The Concord Middle School of the Concord-Carlisle (Massachusetts) Regional School District operates Reading Lab for 1200 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, with each student required to spend a minimum of eighty minutes per week in the lab. Students with remedial, corrective, and developmental needs use the lab simultaneously.⁴³

While enrollment in a secondary reading course is not required of every student, the Trenton Public School in Michigan has had good experience with a developmental approach. The program has been in operation for seven years, in which time some five thousand students have been reached. The three major areas of emphasis are reflected in the titles used to distinguish the various phases of the program:

1. Basic Reading Skills--for those who feel they have severe problems.
2. Reading Techniques--for average or better than average readers.
3. Advanced Reading Techniques-- for those inclined to attend college.

Courses are offered through the elective English program.

The reading courses rank in the top five of all forty

English courses offered. Evaluators note:

By servicing a wide variety of people no one feels ashamed to approach the task of improving his reading ability. This statistical data indicates that this course successfully changes achievement level....The statistical growth is reinforced with student attitudinal inventories. Perhaps the best overall measure of the course was that

⁴³Gail Crawford and Dick Conley, "Meet You in the Reading Lab!" Journal of Reading, XV (October, 1971), 16-21.

of the 200 students in the sample 85% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they are better readers now than at the beginning of the course.⁴⁴

Not all the programs mentioned above are unique. One delights to find other descriptions of programs involving learning centers,⁴⁵ flexible scheduling,⁴⁶ students' grades and goals,⁴⁷ federal grants,⁴⁸ and cooperation of content area teachers.⁴⁹

The very nature of the middle school concept eschews precise modeling and direct adoption. The pioneering middle school reading teacher will, however, find satisfaction in the successes of colleagues who assure that developmental programs are feasible, though demanding of creativity and innovation.

⁴⁴Duane A. Whitson and others, Reading Techniques, A Secondary Reading Course Seven Years, and 5,000 Students Later. (Trenton, Michigan: Trenton Public Schools, 1974). [ERIC; ED 098 500]

⁴⁵Jill Catherine Frankel, "Learning Centers for Reading in Junior High," Journal of Reading, XIX (December, 1975), 243-246.

⁴⁶Ellis, op. cit., pp. 37-42.

⁴⁷Lawrence L. Smith and James Riebock, "A Middle School Tries Contractual Reading," Clearing House, XLV (March, 1971), 404-406.

⁴⁸Nicholas P. Criscuolo, "Seven Creative Reading Programs for the Secondary School," English Journal, LXIV (February, 1975), 76-80.

⁴⁹Robert M. Wilson and Nancy Parkey, "A Modified Reading Program in a Middle School," Journal of Reading, XIII (March, 1970), 447-452.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Learning to read is a long-term developmental process, revealing at each level of educational progress the continuing need for refinement of skills previously taught and the introduction of new skills, some of which require a greater maturity for mastery than do others. Even a brief glance at the status of secondary reading instruction leads one to conclude that for too long too little has been done for too few! It is time for the secondary^{school} reading teacher to emerge from the sanctity of her remedial reading room and become a full participant in the instructional program of the school. Secondary^{school} reading must shed its aura of "special" education and claim its rightful place as an essential curriculum element.

A reading program should have sufficient breadth to provide for the needs of all students--the handicapped reader, the average reader in need of sequential growth toward increasingly higher levels, and the accelerated reader who needs to apply his competencies to challenging content.⁵⁰

Admittedly, the intrinsic reading needs of pupils remain identical whether they are enrolled in traditional school structures or in the more

⁵⁰ Artley, Trends and Practices in Secondary School Reading, p. 109.

recently emerging middle school structures. What is different is the way in which these needs might be met in a middle school in contrast to the ways they might be met in a self-contained classroom or in a departmentalized junior high school.⁵¹

The middle school student, exhibiting his special set of abilities, academic strengths and weaknesses, personality and motivational factors, in a real sense establishes his own curriculum. He requires the support and guidance of those who can help him know "where he is" and point him in the direction of continuing personal growth. Such a student needs a sensitive, understanding, knowledgeable teacher, not a kit of laminated practice materials. He needs involvement in individual conferences, goal setting, and self-evaluation. He needs direct assistance in acquiring to the limits of his potential the skills of reading that gain him access to the vast storehouse of knowledge in all fields.

Recommendations to School Administrators

Administrators must do more than talk about the skills of continued learning. They must act upon the knowledge that "reading is a staple in the instructional program--a base on which all learning is built."⁵² It is necessary to set priorities of budget, facilities, schedule, and personnel to provide for every student the opportunity to develop this skill so necessary for continuing success in learning. It is

⁵¹Duffy, op. cit., p. 57.

⁵²Shelley Umans, "Introduction," New Trends in Reading Instruction (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1963), p. 1.

recommended that administrators review the data of this study and initiate investigative programs that will determine the reading skill needs of their particular school populations.

Recommendations to Secondary^{School} Reading Personnel

Secondary reading personnel must cease to view themselves as isolated servants of education. Communication is acclaimed invaluable in diverse fields; why is it not actively employed in secondary reading? Sharing, exchanging, adapting, modifying, extending--all supplement individual endeavors. The call is to enhance the standards of our profession, to campaign for university training programs in secondary^{school} reading, to sharpen the skills required for being a teacher of teachers, as well as a teacher of students. There is room yet for the pioneer spirit in secondary reading.

Recommendations to the Middle School Reading Teacher

(1) Heed the implications of this study. Look beyond the needy remedial reading group and consider the total middle school population. Accountability urges a response to those good readers who read "at or above grade level" but who still have specific skills deficiencies and who have potential far beyond the limits of achievement.

(2) Plan that during the school year every middle school student will have at least a six-weeks period of instruction in a systematic skills program.

(3) Secure definitive measurement of students' strengths and weaknesses. Until better diagnostic tests

are available, use the McCullough Word Analysis Test and the Tactics A Test.

(4) Use graphs and tables to present visually the individually distinguishing needs of students in a given school population.

(5) Survey commercial materials available for reading beyond the elementary level.

(6) Develop prescriptive lessons to parallel the twelve skills measured by the two recommended tests.

(7) Work with team teachers to facilitate scheduling. A practical plan is to work with one team at a time and cooperate with the English teacher in dividing the group per period so that one half come to the Reading Lab and the other half remain for English instruction. At the end of the six-weeks period, exchange groups.

(8) Maintain a manageable class size (no more than fourteen if there is no paraprofessional help), but enroll remedial, corrective, and developmental students in each group.

(9) With each new group utilize a strong orientation program, interpreting diagnostic scores through the use of a score sheet prepared for each individual to keep in his reading folder. (See sample in Appendix C.)

(10) Constantly search for reports of successful individualized and skills-oriented programs. Let students help in evaluation of the local program.

(11) Continue a particular program feature only until a better approach is devised. Constantly research,

experiment, and change! Seek answer to the question of how the reading program can not only contribute to, but take full advantage of, the middle school concept.

(12) Remember that the middle school student is in a time of transition, a time of becoming. The middle school teacher is not striving to turn out a finished product, though she must assume responsibility for helping to equip the student to meet success in learning experiences.⁵³

America was a young nation when the aged Goethe (1749-1832) declared, "The dear people do not know how long it takes to learn to read. I have been at it all my life and I cannot yet say I have reached the goal." The middle school concept offers new motivation for finally heeding his wise words.

⁵³Duffy, op. cit., p. 47.

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APPENDIX A

DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC SKILL SUBTESTS

The McCullough Word Analysis Test offers seven subtests, each containing thirty items. The Teacher's Manual states the purpose of each test section:

Test I, Initial Blends and Digraphs, tests the pupil's ability to hear a consonant blend or digraph, and to identify the letters which make the sound.

Test II, Phonetic Discrimination, tests the ability to hear the vowel sounds.

Test III, Matching Letters to Vowel Sounds, tests the ability to hear the vowel sounds and identify the letters that make them.

Test IV, Sounding Whole Words, tests the ability to identify consonant and vowel sounds and to blend them into whole words.

Test V, Interpreting Phonetic Symbols, tests the ability to use a pronunciation key.

Test VI, Dividing Words into Syllables, tests the ability to apply rules of syllabication in the division of words.

Test VII, Root Words, tests the ability to divide a word structurally into prefix, root, and suffix.

The five sections of the Tactics A Test used in the diagnostic testing at George Mason Middle School employ a variety of test format:

(1) Dictionary Meaning

Five dictionary entry words with multiple meanings are presented. The student chooses the definition of the word that applies in a particular sentence. Each word is used in a total of three sentences.

(2) Context

A difficult word is underlined in each of twenty sentences. The student considers four choices of the best meaning for the underlined word.

(3) Inference

After reading a very short story, the student must make ten inferences, selecting from a group of multiple choice answers.

(4) Main Idea

(5) Relationships

Six paragraphs, on six different topics, are used. After each paragraph there are three or four questions, some dealing with the main topic of the paragraph, others concerned with patterns of relationship (time order, sequence, cause-effect, comparison-contrast).

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTED TO MIDDLE SCHOOL PERSONNEL

1. How many courses related directly to reading have you completed? _____
Total number of hours credit _____
2. List the titles of your courses in reading.
3. Have you had other course work that considered the area of reading? _____ Explain.
4. During the school year how often do you find yourself concerned with students' ability to read?
Never _____
Sometimes _____
Frequently _____
Daily _____
5. Having seen the data from our September diagnostic reading tests, how do you view the reading needs of our middle school population?
6. Please check your area of responsibility:
English _____
Social Studies _____
Math _____
Science _____
Counseling _____

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE SCORE SHEET

Reading Skills Score Sheet

NAME _____
(Last) (First)

Grade _____ Team _____

Student Number _____

	<u>100%</u>	<u>70%</u>	<u>Pre.</u>	<u>Post</u>
1. Blends and Digraphs	30	21	_____	_____
2. Phonetic Discrimination	30	21	_____	_____
3. Vowels	30	21	_____	_____
4. Sounding Whole Words	30	21	_____	_____
5. Dictionary Pronunciation	30	21	_____	_____
6. Syllabication	30	21	_____	_____
7. Root Words	30	21	_____	_____
8. Dictionary Meaning	15	11	_____	_____
9. Context	20	14	_____	_____
10. Inference	10	7	_____	_____
11. Main Idea	10	7	_____	_____
12. Relationships	10	7	_____	_____